2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Choroti SK6

other tribes have larger flocks and more wives than the rest of their people. It is not a part of the Indian's nature to accumulate property for the future. This habit of living from hand to mouth is the chief reason of the poverty characteristic of the Chaco Indians. Only the women, who are in the first place responsible for the food supply in the house, may save food, at least for the next few days or weeks. The seeds necessary for the next sowing are also guarded by the women.

Among the Chaco Indians there is no law of inheritance, owing to the native custom of destroying a man's property, even his house, after his death.

Honesty is one of the native virtues of the Indians. Among the primitive *Choroti* and *Ashluslay*, who at the time when I travelled in the Chaco were quite unaffected by European civilisation, thefts and other gross crimes were entirely unknown, being prevented by the strong social feeling. Honesty is not only displayed towards fellow-tribesmen, but also towards a stranger and a white man, unless he has through his own conduct forfeited the respect which the primitive Indian, owing to his natural sense of right, would normally have for his property. As a significant proof of this I may mention the following experience which I once had among the Choroti. In April 1912, shortly before I intended to leave these Indians and return to Yacuiba, one of my mules ran away from me and was lost in the forest in the neighbourhood of a Choroti village, and in spite of prolonged searching could not be found. At last I was obliged to leave the village without my mule. At the end of the same year, about eight months later, I again visited these regions and the same Choroti village. My Indian friends at once informed me that some time after I had left, my mule had been caught by some other Choroti Indians and was now being kept in a other village, a few hours walk further off. An Indian was at once sent for the animal, and on the following day the mule was brought and given back to me. The Indians, supposing that I would return some time, had kept the animal, fed it well and taken care of it. It is needless to say that it would have been the easiest thing for them to hide it until I had again left, and to keep it for ever. They however considered it their duty to restore it to its right owner, who was a white friend of theirs. It is also needless to add that had the mule been found by someone of the whites living in these regions, I should never have seen it again.

The savage Indians are frequently accused by the whites of dishonesty. There is, I think, some exaggeration in this; but as a rule however,

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to the extent that the Indian comes under the influence of the whites and gets »civilized», to that extent also he loses the virtue of honesty, as he loses many other virtues characteristic of him while he is in a state of nature. This again is chiefly due to the bad example given by the whites themselves. The latter steal from one another, infringe the proprietary rights of the Indians and commit other wrongs against them. The Indians, who are on this point comparable with children, naturally think they may do the same, and their very sense of justice seems to require that the same measure as is meted to them by the whites, they may themselves measure to the latter again.

M. 273 578 627

The only occasion when crimes may be committed among the Choroti are during the great drinking-feasts. When the Indians are intoxicated with algaroba beer they easily begin to quarrel with one another, and these quarrels in extreme cases may end in homicide. Now the Indians certainly regard a homicide committed in a state of inebriation rather as an accident than as a crime, for the algaroba beer is sacred and an Indian inebriated by it is looked upon as possessed by a spirit and not in the ordinary sense responsible for his acts. But the Indians are anxious to prevent such accidents and this is above all the task of the women, who never themselves drink any intoxicating drinks. On two occasions I witnessed quarrels arising during the drinking-feasts. In one case an Indian, when excessively drunk, got mad and seized his bow and arrow to shoot another Indian on account of some old controversy. Immediately the women took hold of him, deprived him of his weapons, and compelled him to leave the scene of the feast and the whole village. He in fact left for an other village in the vicinity and remained absent for several days, when he was allowed to return to his home. The minds of the two adversaries were then perfectly tranquillized and there was no more grudge between them. In the other case also the women intervened and seized the weapons from the quarrelling men to prevent fights and manslaughter. It is usual in such cases that the offending party is sent away from the village or »exiled» for some time.

T 674

Among the more advanced *Tobas* thefts occasionally take place, but there is a question whether this phenomenon is not due to the influence of the whites, since the Tobas have on the whole been more in contact with civilization than the Choroti. In the case of smaller thefts there is no public punishment among the Tobas; the affair is left to the private concern of the person robbed and the thief. In more serious cases the Council

T 685

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582 583 836 [415] [482] the carrying-net, as much as possible. On the way home he will not assist her to place the *yica* in position. She must seat herself in order to place the band round her forehead and then rise unaided. They then proceed homewards. If the girl has been unable to adjust the yica or to carry it home in one stretch, the man will leave her the same afternoon. A strong and industrious man is not suited to a lazy wife, and vice versa.

581 584 It was definitely maintained that even a strong passion was not sufficient to keep a pair together. Even though the initial choice—made by the girl—was primarily based on affection, the second choice—in which both parties and their parents participate—is the decisive one, and this is based on a number of sensible considerations of an economic and social nature. Here it is particularly the girl's father who plays the decisive part, but as a rule he allows his view to be signified to the daughter through the mother. The girl can flout her parents' advice and marry as she likes, but this type of marriage is not regarded as durable. Normally she follows the advice, and there were times when a father requested a young man to abstain from visiting his daughter. The motives responsible for this appear primarily to be of an economic character. The girl's parents desire [591] an able fisher and hunter as their son-in-law for—with the prevalent matrilocality —they will be very dependent upon a son-in-law's ability to provide.

581 [577] [684] In earlier days bravery in war was considered to be an equally important factor, but this is no longer the case as the need for it has disappeared. On the other hand the girl's father considers it important that the son-in-law should possess a balanced temperament. Irascibility is deemed to be a great vice, in Mataco eyes perhaps the greatest, and, leads for example, in cases of infidelity straight to homicide and blood feuds between the families. In addition it was 582 considered a bad thing to marry into your own band. It was never explained as a ban or incest, but rather as a foolish disposition, because one lost the advantage of having another band, *wilyé*, to rely upon in case of controversial questions. This natural need for strength has caused the Mataco to prefer band-exogamy, and, for example, in the village Yuto on the Rio Pilcomayo, 81 out 88 controlled marriages were exogamous. This system is also considered advantageous by the young men, for even though they stood alone as a stranger in the daily life of their wife's family, they realized that both they and their children might stand in need of aid from another, powerful band. Much suggests that the Mataco 621 bands were formally more locally bound, so that a village consisted in principle 178 of one or two bands plus foreign males-in-law, and one still often sees strangers, young men and girls, come to a village dancing-place in order to seek a sweetheart. [584] Nowadays, however, it is quite easy to find a suitable partner within one's own village because many different bands are now represented there. This mixing is particularly due to the general dispersal of local groups that took place during [797] the Chaco war of the thirties, and a later coming together under the care of the British evangelical mission in accordance with quite different principles. Formerly

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586 [577] Laziness and incompetence are other things that often lead to divorce. If it is the woman who justly is accused of these faults she can be forced out of the house and her parents will take no counter steps. If in such circumstances there are small children in the marriage, she may be allowed to take them, but if the husband continues to send them small gifts and food he retains the right to them and gets them back at an age of 5–6, as they belong to his band. If, on the other hand, he fails to show them any attention, he loses them and may not even be allowed to play with them. Should it be the man who is lazy, his wife makes no mention of it but her parents become angry with him. One day when the man is out seeking food, the parents exhort their daughter to hide herself with some family. When the husband returns home he discovers what is going on without his in-laws saying anything to him. He also says nothing, but begins to collect his things together. He will not leave the house until nightfall, unseen, because he is ashamed, and then return to his family. It is said that this custom was far more widespread [178] a generation ago than it is now. Several women, with a smile, expressed their relief at this as "they would never manage to have any fun out of a man before he was kicked out by his in-laws, for nowadays all men are lazy".

[842] The third—and last—cause of divorce socially recognized is: childless marriages. It is always the woman who is considered to be sterile, and consequently the man who takes the initiative for divorce. However, in such cases it is he who leaves the house, presumably because he has already sought contact with a possible [587] new wife. His sister may help him to get into touch with one of her friends and let them meet secretly in the forest to discover whether they like each other. The man thus leaves the house as he falls under the rule governing unfaithful husband, and not because his wife is sterile.

[587] [589] Whatever the reason for a Mataco divorce, it is always a heavy blow, both morally and economically, for the spouse that is left. The economic loss can only be made good by re-marriage, and this nearly always takes place. Unmarried persons are reduced to living partly on the bounty of the family as occupations are so sharply divided according to sex.

762 A person who feels himself rejected or a victim of unhappy love sometimes commits suicide, which with the Mataco appears to occur particularly in this connexion and is always done in the same manner. The unfortunate one goes [278] alone into the forest and collects the very poisonous fruit of the *sacha sandia* (Capparis salicifolia), which the Indian then cooks lightly and eats. After a few hours when no remedy is possible, the Indian returns home and lies down to sleep. [682] Death comes very shortly. In cases of suicide the spouse of the dead person will always be pointed to as the one responsible. In consequence, the family of the dead person will in many cases start a campaign against that of the spouse to obtain blood vengeance or, more probably, to secure economic compensation.

182 684 628 According to Mataco unwritten law infidelity is severely punished by the loss of home and children. This should occasion no surprise, for adultery, on account